

# Rosa Gershenovich

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Lvov

Ukraine

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Date of interview: July 2002

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## My family background

My father, Moisey Veltman, was born in 1887 in Bershad, in Vinnitsa region. Bershad was a Jewish town. The majority of its population was Jewish. The Jews were mostly tradesmen and craftsmen. The Ukrainians living in the town were mostly farmers. My father was born into a very religious Jewish family. His father, Aron-Shloime Veltman, born in the 1860s was a melamed in the cheder. . My grandfather was a very educated man for his time. He had excellent knowledge of the Talmud and the Torah, and taught children to read in Hebrew. He was a very well respected teacher in Bershad. My grandfather's family lived in a small house near the synagogue. There was a little porch up two or three stairs, and two rooms in the house. They had quite a few children. There was not enough space for them. My grandfather taught children from the whole town in one of the rooms. I visited my grandfather and grandmother in the 1920s. By that time, grandfather was an old man already. He didn't work any more. He showed me the room that had previously served as a cheder. There were long tables and benches in it. Later, I read in Sholem Aleichem's books [1](#) that teachers used to beat the children in cheder, but I just couldn't imagine my kind grandfather beating anyone.

When I knew him, grandfather was an old man with a gray beard and yarmulka. He spoke only Yiddish and prayed a lot. My grandmother asked us to be very quiet while he was praying. He went to synagogue almost every day. He had a seat by the Eastern wall - this was an place of honor. I remember him praying in his room with his face turned to the wall, with little cubes [tefillin] on his hands and forehead, and wrapped in a tallit.

He used to play with me and tell me jokes. He spoke Yiddish to me. My grandfather not only knew all the Jewish holidays, but could also explain the meaning of every holiday. I used to visit my grandparents in the summer. I remember a Jewish holiday called Shavuot. My grandfather didn't go to bed on the night of this holiday, but stayed up all night reading the tikkun Shavuot [the Book of Ruth], which contains the main ideas and provisions of both the Written and Oral TorahLaw. I was given scissors and colored paper to cut out patterns to decorate the windows. My grandmother

cooked dairy meals on this day. I remember eating pancakes stuffed with cottage cheese dipped in honey. My grandfather was sitting at the table saying that the Ttorah was as sweet to us as honey.

My grandfather was a very kind man. He was 'loyal,' as would be proper to say nowadays. He understood that children had to go their own way and live their own lives. He never forced his children to practice religion. My grandfather had a large collection of religious books in Hebrew. His conduct of Hebrew was very good. I didn't understand what these books were about. I remember my mother showing me poems by Mandelshtam [2](#) and Ginsburg, one of the first enlightened Jews in Russia, and also the History of Peter the Great in Hebrew. I don't know whether my grandfather's children read those books, too. I also remember Russian books by Pushkin, Lermontov [3](#) and Gogol [4](#) in imprinted golden bindings.

My grandfather dearly loved his wife Tuba-Leya Veltman [nee Shnaiderman]. She was also born in Bershad in 1865. She also came from a religious family. On her wedding day she had her hair shaved according to the Jewish tradition and wore a wig for the rest of her life. I remember her wearing a wig and a white shawl. My grandmother was a very smart woman. She was fat and sickly. She had hypertension and a poor heart. She had a terrific sense of humor. My grandfather used to make her a cup of tea with sugar and would hand it to her. I believe it shows how nicely he treated her. She was always busy doing work around the house, cooking delicious Jewish food and pastries.

The Germans killed my grandmother and grandfather in 1942. When the war began their younger son Ershl came to Bershad to take them to evacuation. My grandfather said that because he and grandmother were old already and because grandmother was a very ill woman, they were going to stay. Ershl came to Bershad after the war and people told him that like many other Jews in the ghetto his parents were shot by the Germans.

My grandmother and grandfather had many children, but not all of them lived to old age. I know two of their daughters and two sons. All of them except my father followed my grandfather's footsteps and became teachers.

Their daughter Nesia, born in 1892, was married. She was a teacher of Yiddish in the Jewish school. In the 1930s the Jewish schools in Bershad were closed down and Nesia studied at the Pedagogical Institute in Kamenets- Podolsk. She became a teacher of Russian and worked in Russian schools. She was evacuated to the town of Kuznetsk in the Urals and returned to Lvov after the war. Nesia died in Lvov in 1980. Her daughter Nelia is a teacher and her son Leonid is an engineer. They are retired now and live in Lvov.

My father's other sister Dvoira, born in 1895, was also a teacher of Yiddish in a Jewish school. She lived in Odessa. She was in evacuation in Omsk region in Siberia. After the war she didn't work. She suffered from heart disease and died in Lvov in 1958. Her daughters Nina and Nyusia emigrated to Israel in 1986. Nyusia died there.

My father's brother Ershl, born in 1899, was a mathematics teacher in a secondary school. In the 1930s he moved to Donbass [Donetsk]. We rarely saw each other. I know that he died there in 1990. His son Mark lives in Israel and his daughter Rosa, also a teacher, lives in Donetsk.

My grandparents' other son Velv died when he was very young. I don't know anything about him.

My father was a worker and a painter. He finished cheder and didn't want to continue his studies. He participated in various revolutionary organizations. Unlike other Jewish boys he wasn't afraid to serve in the tsarist army. He was tall and strong. He served for six years in the cavalry, from 1906 to 1912. From what my mother told me, my father was proud of his service in the tsarist army. He didn't know Russian before he went into the army. While in the army, he learned to speak, read and write Russian. I believe my father brought his revolutionary ideas from the army. He came back a member of the Bund [5](#).

My mother, Elizaveta Veltman [nee Green], was born in 1879 in the town of Okny near Bershad. We called her by her Jewish name, Leya, in the family. Her father, Avrum-Yankel Green, born in the 1860s, had a beautiful voice and was a cantor. He got invitations from synagogues in different towns and was very popular wherever he sang. I don't know what family he came from, but he was a deeply religious man. He sang at the synagogue in Odessa in the last years of his life and died in Odessa in 1918. I was only 4 years old, but I can still remember my grandfather's voice. I never heard anything like that again.

His wife, Ruhl Green, was about the same age as he. She was born in the 1860s and was a quiet, modest Jewish woman. She always supported her children. After my father perished she moved in with us to give my mother an opportunity to go to work. She looked after me. She was a taciturn old woman. She wore long black gowns and covered her head with a shawl. Times were hard during the Civil War [6](#) and we didn't even have enough bread. My mother and grandmother exchanged our possessions for bread and milk for me. But even then my grandmother tried to observe Jewish traditions. She lit candles before on Saturdays, prayed, and went to synagogue. We only spoke Yiddish in the family. This was the only language I knew when as a child. My grandmother died in 1921 as quietly as she had lived. She went to bed and didn't wake up one morning. My mother buried her near my grandfather's grave in the Jewish cemetery in Odessa. I didn't go to the funeral, but stayed at our neighbor's. Regretfully, I was not able to find their graves after the war.

My mother told me that my grandmother and grandfather had many children, but only three of them lived: my mother's older sister, Surah, born in 1875, and her brother Ershl, born in 1880. Surah lived in Rybnitsa, a small town in Moldavia, and Ershl lived in Odessa. We were very close with both of them. Surah was married to Ershl Shnaiderman, my paternal grandmother's brother. Marriages between relatives often take place in Jewish families.

I don't know what kind of elementary education was given to girls in the Green family, but my mother and her sister were well-educated women. They could read and write in Russian and Yiddish. Yiddish was spoken in all the familys. My mother told me a little about her childhood. As my grandfather was a cantor, they often moved from one place to another. My mother saw many Jewish towns within the Jewish Pale of Settlement [7](#). My mother was a very beautiful woman. They say about women like her that their eyes have absorbed all the sorrows of the Jewish people. She had huge hazel eyes and thick black hair.

My mother and father met in Odessa. My father's sister Dvoira studied in Odessa. My mother was her friend. Dvoira introduced her to her brother Moisey when he came to visit his sister before going to serve in the army. They fell in love with each other, although my mother was few years older than my father. While my father was in the army matchmakers came to his father many

times offering rich fiancées for my father. My grandfather always answered that Moisey loved Leya and that was it.

They had a traditional Jewish wedding in Bershada in 1912. There was a chuppah, a rabbi and klezmer musicians at the wedding. The party lasted for 3 days. My father wasn't religious any more, but he paid honors to his parents and the parents of his fiancée. My father believed that Jews had to struggle for a new life and to get education. He thought that religion was for backward, ignorant people. After their wedding my parents moved to Odessa. My father worked as a painter there, but he didn't work in that job for long. He was kept busy with revolutionary activities. He spread leaflets, took part in meetings, and participated in publishing revolutionary newspapers in Russian and in Yiddish. My father believed that the revolution would liberate poor Jews from national oppression. My mother said that he even had to hide from the police. He involved her in party activities as well.

### Growing up

My name is Rosa Gershenovich [nee Veltman]. I was born in Rybnitsa in 1914. My father was hiding from the police at that time and was away from Odessa. My mother's sister Surah lived in Rybnitsa and my father took my mother to live with her. We lived there until I was about 6 months old, and then we returned to Odessa. We lived in a one-room apartment in the center of the city. There were many Jewish families, as well as Greek, Ukrainian and Russian families living there. All life went on in the yard; people were very close and sociable. They did their laundry, had discussions and arguments and educated their children in the yard. I was a little girl and didn't have friends in the yard, but I remember that all the women addressed each other as 'Madam'. My mother was 'Madam Veltman'. During the Civil War the neighbors supported each other.

We lived in a small room. I remember a chest of drawers, a bed, a table and chairs. We didn't have any decorations. Or, perhaps we had, but my mother had exchanged them for food. There was a richer Jewish family in the neighboring building. During the Civil War bandits came to them demanding money and valuables. They tore up their pillows looking for gold. They killed the whole family. My mother said the bandits were from the Petliura [8](#) units. Fortunately, these Petliura units didn't come to us. They probably knew which families were rich and which were poor.

I have dim memories of my father, but I remember the day when he went to defend Odessa from the White Army [the Whites] [9](#). I was only 5 years old then. I remember that three visitors came that night - my mother said that they were from the Bund - my father's comrades. My father left with them. He was wearing his casual trousers and a jacket. He was tall and wore a moustache. My nice, kind father kissed me and said to my mother: 'I must go with them so that our daughter can have a better life'. My mother was crying and didn't want to let him go. That was the last time when we saw him. We were told later that he had perished. My mother told me that he had loved her very much. She waited and waited for him to return, but when she realized that he was gone she grew old and gray. I don't remember the Civil War. I only remember when a neighbor came in saying 'Leya, Petliura units are leaving the town'. My mother said, 'Thank God!' 'What will happen now?' 'Now the Reds [10](#) will come.'

My mother tried to find a job in Odessa. In 1919 she took a medical course and completed it successfully. Unemployment in Odessa was high and it was next to impossible to get a job. My mother's sister Surah, who was living in Rybnitsa, invited my mother and me to come live with her

there. My mother packed up and we left.

Rybnitsa was a town on the Dnestr River. The Dnestr was the border separating Soviet Moldavia from Romania. It was necessary to obtain a permit to go to Rybnitsa. Frontier guards checked everybody's documents on the train. Rybnitsa was a Jewish town surrounded by mountains. The Moldavians lived in the mountains and the Jews lived in town. Surah's husband owned a store that sold kerosene, candles, matches, soap, and other things. Their house was not very big. My mother and her sister Surah were very close. The family gave us a room to live in. My aunt had 3 children. The oldest, Gidal, was born in 1912 and perished during the war in 1943. Volodia, born in 1924, also went to the front, but survived. He married after the war; he worked at a plant in Odessa and was promoted to foreman. After retiring he still lives in Odessa. My aunt's daughter named Dora was born in 1916. She finished her studies at the Medical College in Odessa and married Naum Fridman, a military man who provided well for his family. Dora was a housewife. They now live in Israel.

In Rybnitsa my mother got a job as a nurse. She worked a lot. First, she worked at a hospital, and then she had some further training and began to work at the children's clinic. The doctor she worked with neglected her responsibilities and my mother did most of the work by herself. Patients respected my mother and knew her well in the small town where most people knew each other. Sometimes, in case of an emergency mother was called to a patient at night. The hospital in Rybnitsa had three or four wards. There were three doctors: Dr. Waister, Dr. Shmelianskiy and Dr. Kogan. All three were Jews. My mother was a trade union activist and was elected Chairman of the Medical Trade Union Unit. She wasn't a party member.

Surah's family observed all Jewish traditions and spoke Yiddish among themselves. I remember them asking me 'di fir kashes' [the four questions] on seder night, which goes like this: 'Why is this night different from any other night?'. I replied, something but I don't remember what. They asked me to open the door for the prophet Elijah to come in. They also set an extra place for him on the table. According to the Jewish legend the prophet Elijah visits every home on the first day of Pesach and drinks from the cup that has been poured for him. He is invisible but he can see everything in the house. The door is kept open for the prophet to come in and honor the holiday with his presence.

My uncle went to synagogue every Friday and Saturday. My Aunt Surah was responsible for collecting charity contributions for the poor in the town. My uncle owned Jewish religious books, but I don't remember him having any Russian books or newspapers. My mother and I went to synagogue only on major holidays. It was a small synagogue. We sat in the women's gallery and watched the men in their tallitim praying. There was very little we could see. We didn't know anything about the outer world. We didn't travel and didn't have any visitors. My mother didn't cook kosher food during the era of Soviet power. There were no conditions for this. However, we didn't eat pork. We ate chicken and beef. There was a river in the town and we had a lot of fish. My mother made stuffed fish. She cooked on a primus stove.

## **My school years**

In 1922 I started going to the Russian lower secondary school, which I attended for seven years. There was also a Jewish school in Rybnitsa. But my mother told me that she and my aunt had discussed the subject of which school I should attend and they decided that it was better for me to

study Russian in order to be able to continue my education later. My school was in a two-story building in the center of town. The majority of the children at the school were Jewish. I mastered my Russian at this school. There were Russian and Moldavian children, but we Jews stood separately. We stayed together - not on purpose, it just happened to be so. We communicated and played with the other children, but were not close friends with them. I can't say that there was any anti-Semitism. Only once, I remember, when we went out with other children and there were Russian girls there, one of them approached me and asked me to say the letter 'r'. It was a common belief that Jews couldn't pronounce this sound. I pronounced it perfectly and she said, 'Good'. They didn't want to play with any of the children who mispronounced this letter.

We lived in the embankment street where the wealthier families lived: store owners, doctors, etc. Poorer people, etc. shoemakers, tailors, workers etc, etc., lived farther out. All my friends were Jews. After finishing school, my friend Polia Finegersh became an accountant. She and her mother perished in Tiraspol in 1941. My other friend, Polia Glzman, moved to Tiraspol with her husband who perished at the front in 1942. Polia had a daughter.

In 1924 when Lenin died I was 10 years old. We were lined up at school by the portrait of Lenin. Many of the children and teachers were crying. I don't remember whether I was crying or not. Soon afterwards we became pioneers. We wore red neckties and badges bearing a portrait of Lenin. I became a pioneer so that I would be no different from the others, but when it was time to become a member of the Komsomol [11](#) I didn't want to join. I don't know why, I just couldn't be bothered. Everyone accepted the reality of living in a communist state. They just understood that it was the only way possible. My mother tried to forget her past life with her wealthy parents. She never mentioned to anyone that she was a member of the Bund. This party was regarded as a bourgeois party and it was not safe to disclose that one had been a member of it.

My uncle, a storeowner, was expelled from Rybnitsa. He lived in a village and had no rights. He was classified as 'an owner' by the Soviet authorities, which didn't like such elements. My cousin Dora couldn't find a job. Their family moved to Odessa. My uncle got a job working at the Red Komintern Machine Building Plant. They left their house to my mother and me. My mother and I stayed in their house while mother continued to work and I went to school. We didn't observe any Jewish traditions at home but continued going to synagogue. Our life in Rybnitsa was rather plain. There was a dancing club, but it was closed in the 1930s. It was closed because there were only Jewish youngsters there. They danced Jewish dances like the 'Seven Forty' and the waltz. Life in Rybnitsa back then was like living in the Middle Ages. Electricity came to this town in the late 1930s only. There was no sewerage system or running water, and no central heating. There were only dirt roads. People had no education and the general level of culture was very low. Young people were always trying to leave Rybnitsa. There was Vizin, a Romanian town on the other side of Rybnitsa, but we were not allowed to cross the border. Sometimes we heard shooting at night. This meant that someone was trying to cross the border. Some were captured or killed and others managed to cross. We didn't travel. I remember visiting my father's parents in Bershada and going to the country once after I had pneumonia. My mother stayed a month there with me. We rented a room in a house. There was an orchard and our landlady had a cow. We had fruit and milk and my health improved.

I finished school in 1931. There was famine in Rybnitsa in the 1930s., We didn't have anything to eat and we were starving. My mother had two golden dental crowns. She took them to the Torgsin

store [12](#) and exchanged them for some corn flour to make corn porridge.

I was admitted to the Financial College in Odessa. This was the largest city near Rybnitsa, and Surah's family lived there. It was good to have somebody to turn to. I lived at my aunt's. They lived in the center of the city in a big five-story building in a communal apartment [13](#) with many tenants, but I don't remember them. I studied accounting, Russian and Ukrainian and mathematics. There were many Jewish students and teachers at the college. Nationality was not an issue at that time. I didn't have any real friends, but there were companions for going to the cinema or for a walk. I like Odessa very much. I liked going to the port, Richelieu Street and the center of the city. Once, I saw Verdi's Aida at the Opera. I don't know whether there were Jewish theaters in Odessa then. My aunt had a small collection of books by Soviet writers like Gorky [14](#), Mayakovsky [15](#), Fadeyev [16](#), and others. My aunt's family observed the Jewish traditions and celebrated holidays, but I took no interest in them. I believed traditions and religiosity to be a vestige of the past. I couldn't stay in Odessa after finishing college. I didn't have a place to live and it was difficult to find a job.

In 1936 I returned to Rybnitsa where I worked as an accountant for the District Party Executive Committee. I didn't want to become a party member. Besides, I was too young for that. Life was very dull. I embroidered in the evening and went to the cultural center sometimes to watch old silent movies. In 1938 Moishe Shnaiderman, the brother of my Aunt Surah's husband, came from Moscow. He was a widower of over 60 years. His wife had died some time before and he proposed to my mother and invited her to go to Moscow with him. They didn't have a wedding party. Besides, all synagogues had been closed by then. The authorities pursued a serious struggle against religion [17](#). My mother moved to Moscow with pleasure. My mother didn't work in Moscow. Her husband was a pensioner. He was a very nice, decent man and they had a very good and quiet life together.

I stayed behind in Rybnitsa and moved to Tiraspol, the capital of the Moldavian Republic, in 1939. Tiraspol was a big, beautiful town compared to Rybnitsa. My friend Polia Finegersh lived there with her husband, and I stayed with them. I got a job as a cashier and then as an accountant in the Central Bank. There were many Jews in Tiraspol. The chief accountant at my workplace was Russian; all the other employees were Jewish. I rented a room from a Jewish family, the Roizmans. They were not religious. I believe they did observe some traditions, but I took little notice of anything of this kind. They were an old couple and they treated me very nicely.

### **Married life and the beginning of the war**

I met my future husband, Ruvim Gershenovich in 1940. He came from Kiev to visit his relatives, the Roizmans, the couple from whom I was renting my room. Ruvim was born in Nezhin in the Chernigov region in Ukraine in 1905. He graduated from the Financial College in Kiev. He was an ordinary man, and very nice and caring. He worked as an accountant in Kiev. He stayed in Tiraspol for a few days and then returned to Kiev. Later, he sent me a letter, writing that he liked me very much. The letter was in Russian, but he spoke Yiddish. When we got married he used to speak Yiddish to me and I addressed him in Russian. We corresponded for a year. He came back at the end of 1940 and we registered our marriage in Tiraspol. After we got married he used to speak Yiddish to me and I addressed him in Russian. He was planning to rent an apartment in the summer of 1941 so I could move to Kiev. I couldn't move to Kiev before he rented an apartment because he was living in one room with his parents.

Our plans were thwarted by the events of June 22, 1941 [the day Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union]. The war began. I remember this day so clearly. I went to the market in the morning and heard loud roaring. I thought there was some kind of military training going on. Many people thought so, too. But then the bombing of the aerodrome near town began. We still didn't know anything about the war. Then at noon we heard Molotov [18](#) on the radio. The war began at 5am. Two days later my husband arrived from Kiev. He told me that I had to go to his parents and that he was to be recruited to the army. There were many Jewish refugees from Poland. From them we heard about the mass shootings of Jews by the fascists in Europe. We realized that we had to run away.

We took a train to Kiev on that same day. I met his parents. His father, Oshel Gershenovich, was a tailor. His mother Perl was a housewife. They were nice old people. They only spoke Yiddish. They lived in the central part of town. My husband went to the military registry office, but they let him go due to his poor eyesight. They summoned him at the end of July. He was at the front for four long years. Kiev was bombed.

Some acquaintances of my husband got a horse-driven cart and let us join them. This was in August 1941. On this cart were my husband's parents, another couple, the cart man and I. We went along the Dnieper River to the south. We passed Nikolayev and reached Kherson. Crowds of people were waiting for transportation at the Golaya Pristan station. It was the end of August and the heat was oppressive. We managed to get on a train. Somewhere in Donbass we changed the trains and were going now in railcars for cattle transportation. We were bombed on the way and had to get off the train to scatter around and come back later. We finally reached Tashkent. I was glad that my mother was in Moscow. My mother told me that she and Moishe had a bowl of feathers prepared. If the Germans occupied Moscow mother and Moishe were going to burn these feathers to suffocate in the smoke.

There was no room for us in Tashkent and we moved on to Namangan in Uzbekistan, about 50 km from Tashkent. At first, we got a small room in a clay house. Later, my husband's father fell ill. He died in hospital at the end of November 1941. We buried him at the cemetery in Namangan. There was no Jewish cemetery in this town. Ruvim's mother died a little later, in January 1942. She was buried in the same cemetery. I met somebody I knew in Rybnitsa and he employed me in his shoe shop. There were four shoemakers working there. One was a Polish Jew and the others were Russian, I think. I lived in this shop, working as an accountant during the day, and at night I slept on my desk. I had a pillow and a blanket for colder nights. I had very few clothes: a coat, a couple of dresses and some shoes. I kept them under my desk. There was an aryk [water channel] in the yard of our shop where I could wash and do the laundry. The water was very clean and potable.

I was desperately lonely. I didn't know where my husband was. He wrote my mother and I wrote my mother and we found each other in this way. He wrote me in Uzbekistan. He was at the front. In the beginning he was a soldier, and then a sergeant. He couldn't support me financially. Only officers could support their families by sending them special certificates on the basis of which military registration offices paid allowances to the families. Military men of lower ranks didn't have this possibility.

Namangan was a big Uzbek town. There were very rich and full markets there. I didn't have money to buy anything. I could only afford a bun that cost 10 rubles. I had to make this bun last for a



whole day. I received 400 grams of brown bread and that was the only other food I had for a day. There were many Jews in evacuation in Namangan, but I didn't know any of them. I don't know whether there were any Jewish activities. I was happy to receive letters from my family and husband. My husband went across Russia, Ukraine, Poland and Czechoslovakia during the war. I was very happy that he survived. At the beginning of 1945 he was wounded and stayed in hospital. He got better there and was demobilized.

## My life in Lvov

My husband knew that his house in Kiev had been destroyed. His commanding officer got an assignment in Lvov in the summer of 1945. He suggested that Ruvim should go to Lvov and said he would help him find a job. Lvov was forced to join the USSR in 1940. After the war Polish people were allowed to go to Poland and many of them left Lvov. There were many vacant apartments. Ruvim found an apartment for us and called me to come to Lvov. On my way from Namangan to Lvov I spent two weeks in Piatigorsk visiting my cousin Dora. We had a wonderful reunion. Her husband was still in Germany and she was living in Piatigorsk.

I liked Lvov. It was a beautiful European town with European architecture typical of the Middle Ages, beautiful churches and cathedrals, streets and buildings. The local population hated the Soviet power, but was scared of Stalin. They were afraid to open their mouths. Our janitor took off his hat when he came to us and kissed my hand. I felt very strange. Nobody had ever kissed my hand before. And he bowed endlessly. There were Jews coming to town from evacuation. At first the locals were afraid of the Jews, but then their anti-Semitism burst out. There were inscriptions everywhere on the walls: 'Zhyds [kikes], get out of Ukraine!' and 'Get out of Lvov!'

When I arrived in Lvov, my husband was working as an accountant at a tailor's shop. Later, it became a garment factory. My daughter Maya was born in 1949. She went to kindergarten when she turned 3 years old, and I got a job as an accountant at the garment factory where my husband was working.

In autumn of 1949 I went to Moscow and brought my mother to Lvov. Her husband, Moshe Shnaiderman, had died, and she was old and needed to be taken care of. In 1951 my mother died from a myocardial infarction. We buried her at the Jewish cemetery in Lvov.

In 1953 Stalin died and I cried like everybody else. We believed that anti-Semitism in Lvov was a local phenomenon and had hoped that Stalin would protect us. We didn't understand then that anti-Semitism in the USSR was a state policy, initiated by Stalin.

We lead a quiet life. My husband was a very decent, quiet, kind man. He loved our daughter dearly. He liked to speak Yiddish when there were no outsiders around. Anti-Semitism in Lvov was stronger than anywhere else. It always existed in this area regardless of the regime. It grew stronger after the war, because it was common knowledge that the majority of the communists who had established the Soviet power in Russia were Jews. People in Lvov hated the Soviet power and had much fear of it. They believed Jews to be supporters of the Soviet power. We were openly despised and we could often hear in the streets and in public transportation: 'Zhyds [kikes], go to Israel!' It was not advisable to show one's Jewish identity and we gave up our Jewish traditions. We had Jewish colleagues and we had friends among them, but we were not demonstrative about our friendships because we thought it might cause undesirable reactions.

In autumn 1949 I went to Moscow and brought my mother to Lvov. Her husband Moshe Shnaiderman died and she was old and needed to be taken care of. In 1951 my mother died from infarction. We buried her at the Jewish cemetery in Lvov. My husband was wounded during the war and had a shell splinter in his chest. Doctors told him that they would suggest surgery if the splinter began to move. One evening he felt very ill on his way home. When he got home, he fainted. I called an ambulance. But he got worse and died. The splinter must have reached his heart. He died in 1957 when he was 52 years old. Maya lost her father when she was 9 years old.

### **My daughter Maya**

I always told her to have Jewish friends, because they would always be supportive and never call one a 'zhyd'. It was one of the ways to feel more confident in a hostile environment. She studied at the Russian school. There were very few Jewish girls there. She had a friend named Maya Gleizer. They were very good friends. Maya Gleizer is in America now. She moved there 20 years ago. My daughter loves her Jewish it is enough that people. She says Jews are the most intelligent people in the world. She studied at school very successfully. After graduating she tried to gain admission to the Polytechnic Institute in Lvov several times, but failed. It was next to impossible for a Jewish girl who came from a low-income family to enter an institution of higher education.

In 1966 Maya got a job as a computer operator. She held this job for 30 years. She went to work at age 16, because the state of our finances was grave. Later, after 30 years, the factory where she worked was closed and she lost her job. It was difficult for a Jew to find a job in Lvov. Once, she was told about a vacancy. She went to the human resources department to inquire. A woman there confirmed that there was a vacancy and told her to come by the following day with her passport. On the following day the woman opened her passport and saw that Maya was a Jew. She said 'You know, we have already employed someone'. My daughter lost all hope of finding a job. She was feeling hurt and offended. She felt as if she had been shrugged off.

She had said a while before: 'We need to go away from here. We have to go to Israel. I want to be among our own people. I want to feel like a human being.' She always wanted to emigrate to Israel. I believe she would go there with or without me. We didn't have an opportunity to go in the past. And now she is very ill. She has stomach problems. And we are old. Does anybody need us there?

She wasn't happy in her personal life either. Her husband was a Jew. But I don't want to talk about him. It is enough that she divorced him. She wouldn't have married a Russian man. There have never been any mixed marriages in our family anyway. If she wanted to marry a Russian man she would have had a number of options. There were quite a few Russian men that wanted to marry her. But she says that she is not young any more and that she doesn't need anybody.

Now we are old and sick. Does anybody need us there? Unfortunately, my daughter's Yiddish is very poor. It is my fault, for I thought that Yiddish was going to be of no use to her, especially in this part of the country, in Galicia, so I didn't teach her Yiddish. She can understand it all right, but she can hardly speak the language. I don't remember anything about Jewish traditions or religion. I haven't taught my daughter any Jewish basics.

The situation in Lvov is acute now. There is a lot of anti-Semitism. There are inscriptions on the wall, 'Zhyds [kikes], get out of Ukraine!'. Once, a drunken man came to our building. He began to knock on the doors asking, 'Where do zhyds live here?' He was thrown out of the building because

he was drunk. In general, the attitude towards Jews is terrible here. There is an anti-Semitic newspaper, the Idealist. They write that it is necessary to deport all Jews from Ukraine, that there is no place for them here, that Ukraine should be for Ukrainians. We often read this kind of thing in chauvinistic Ukrainian newspapers, hear it on the radio, and even in the streets.

I retired in 1986 when I was 72 years old. It was quite some time ago, and I was healthier then. Later, I got hypertension, arrhythmia and glaucoma. In 1986 I got cataracts. I had a hip injury that caused arthrosis. I can hardly walk. Twice a week representatives from Hesed come and take me to the daytime center. This is the only place where I can talk with people. We have beautiful receptions there. They tell us that we are still young and that we are wanted. They treat us very nicely. They tell us a lot of interesting things about Jewish culture and we sing in Hebrew. We get copies with the lyrics of these songs. Hesed also supports me. Hesed is a big help. They bring me butter, sugar, cereals, pasta, etc. It's a great assistance, you know. It is a huge support for me and my daughter.

## Glossary

### **1 Sholem Aleichem (pen name of Shalom Rabinovich (1859-1916))**

Yiddish author and humorist, a prolific writer of novels, stories, feuilletons, critical reviews, and poem in Yiddish, Hebrew and Russian. He also contributed regularly to Yiddish dailies and weeklies. In his writings he described the life of Jews in Russia, creating a gallery of bright characters. His creative work is an alloy of humor and lyricism, accurate psychological and details of everyday life. He founded a literary Yiddish annual called Di Yidishe Folksbibliotek (The Popular Jewish Library), with which he wanted to raise the despised Yiddish literature from its mean status and at the same time to fight authors of trash literature, who dragged Yiddish literature to the lowest popular level. The first volume was a turning point in the history of modern Yiddish literature. Sholem Aleichem died in New York in 1916. His popularity increased beyond the Yiddish-speaking public after his death. Some of his writings have been translated into most European languages and his plays and dramatic versions of his stories have been performed in many countries. The dramatic version of Tevye the Dairyman became an international hit as a musical (Fiddler on the Roof) in the 1960s.

### **2 Mandelshtam, Osip Emilyevich (1891-1938)**

Russian Jewish poet and translator. He converted to Lutheranism to be able to enter the University of St. Petersburg. He started publishing poetry from 1910 and in 1911 he joined the Guild of Poets and was a leader of the Acmeist school. He wrote impersonal, fatalistic, meticulously constructed poems. He opposed the Bolsheviks but he did not leave Russia after the Revolution of 1917. However, he stopped writing poetry in 1923 and turned to prose. He had to make a living as a translator of contemporary German, French and English authors. In 1934 he was arrested for writing an unflattering epigram about Stalin and sentenced to three years' exile in the Ural. In Voronezh, Mandelshtam wrote one of his most important poetic works, The Voronezh Notebooks. He returned to Moscow in 1937 but was arrested again in 1938 and was sentenced without trial to five years' of hard labor. According to unverifiable reports he died of inanition either in 1938 in a transit camp near Vladivostok in the Far East, or in 1940 in a labor camp on the Kolymar River, Siberia.

### **3 Lermontov, Mikhail, (1814-1841)**

Russian poet and novelist. His poetic reputation, second in Russia only to Pushkin's, rests upon the lyric and narrative works of his last five years. Lermontov, who had sought a position in fashionable society, became enormously critical of it. His novel, A Hero of Our Time (1840), is partly autobiographical. It consists of five tales about Pechorin, a disenchanted and bored nobleman. The novel is considered a classic of Russian psychological realism.

### **4 Gogol, Nikolai (1809-1852)**

Russian novelist, dramatist, satirist, founder of the so-called critical realism in Russian literature, best known for his novel the Dead Souls (1842).

### **5 Bund**

The short name of the General Jewish Union of Working People in Lithuania, Poland and Russia, Bund means Union in Yiddish). The Bund was a social democratic organization representing Jewish craftsmen from the Western areas of the Russian Empire. It was founded in Vilnius in 1897. In 1906 it joined the autonomous fraction of the Russian Social Democratic Working Party and took up a Menshevist position. After the Revolution of 1917 the organization split: one part was anti-Soviet power, while the other remained in the Bolsheviks' Russian Communist Party. In 1921 the Bund dissolved itself in the USSR, but continued to exist in other countries.

### **6 Civil War (1918-1920)**

The Civil War between the Reds (the Bolsheviks) and the Whites (the anti-Bolsheviks), which broke out in early 1918, ravaged Russia until 1920. The Whites represented all shades of anti-communist groups - Russian army units from World War I, led by anti-Bolshevik officers, by anti-Bolshevik volunteers and some Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries. Several of their leaders favored setting up a military dictatorship, but few were outspoken tsarists. Atrocities were committed throughout the Civil War by both sides. The Civil War ended with Bolshevik military victory, thanks to the lack of cooperation among the various White commanders and to the reorganization of the Red forces after Trotsky became commissar for war. It was won, however, only at the price of immense sacrifice; by 1920 Russia was ruined and devastated. In 1920 industrial production was reduced to 14% and agriculture to 50% as compared to 1913.

### **7 Jewish Pale of Settlement**

Certain provinces in the Russian Empire were designated for permanent Jewish residence and the Jewish population (apart from certain privileged families) was only allowed to live in these areas.

### **8 Petliura, Simon (1879-1926)**

Ukrainian politician, member of the Ukrainian Social Democratic Working Party, one of the leaders of Centralnaya Rada (Central Council), the national government of Ukraine (1917-1918). Military units under his command killed Jews during the Civil War in Ukraine. In the Soviet-Polish war he was on the side of Poland; in 1920 he emigrated. He was killed in Paris by the Jewish nationalist

Schwarzbard in revenge for the pogroms against Jews in Ukraine.

## **9 Whites (White Army)**

Counter-revolutionary armed forces that fought against the Bolsheviks during the Russian Civil War. The White forces were very heterogeneous: They included monarchists and liberals - supporters of the Constituent Assembly and the tsar. Nationalist and anti-Semitic attitude was very common among rank-and-file members of the white movement, and expressed in both their propaganda material and in the organization of pogroms against Jews. White Army slogans were patriotic. The Whites were united by hatred towards the Bolsheviks and the desire to restore a 'one and inseparable' Russia. The main forces of the White Army were defeated by the Red Army at the end of 1920.

## **10 Reds**

Red (Soviet) Army supporting the Soviet authorities.

## **11 Komsomol**

Communist youth political organization created in 1918. The task of the Komsomol was to spread of the ideas of communism and involve the worker and peasant youth in building the Soviet Union. The Komsomol also aimed at giving a communist upbringing by involving the worker youth in the political struggle, supplemented by theoretical education. The Komsomol was more popular than the Communist Party because with its aim of education people could accept uninitiated young proletarians, whereas party members had to have at least a minimal political qualification.

## **12 Torgsin stores**

Special retail stores, which were established in larger Russian cities in the 1920s with the purpose of selling goods to foreigners. Torgsins sold commodities that were in short supply for hard currency or exchanged them for gold and jewelry, accepting old coins as well. The real aim of this economic experiment that lasted for two years was to swindle out all gold and valuables from the population for the industrial development of the country.

## **13 Communal apartment**

The Soviet power wanted to improve housing conditions by requisitioning 'excess' living space of wealthy families after the Revolution of 1917. Apartments were shared by several families with each family occupying one room and sharing the kitchen, toilet and bathroom with other tenants. Because of the chronic shortage of dwelling space in towns shared apartments continued to exist for decades. Despite state programs for the construction of more houses and the liquidation of shared apartments, which began in the 1960s, shared apartments still exist today.

## **14 Gorky, Maxim (born Alexei Peshkov) (1868-1936)**

Russian writer, publicist and revolutionary.

### **15 Mayakovsky, Vladimir Vladimirovich (1893-1930)**

Russian poet and dramatist. Mayakovsky joined the Social Democratic Party in 1908 and spent much time in prison for his political activities for the next two years. Mayakovsky triumphantly greeted the Revolution of 1917 and later he composed propaganda verse and read it before crowds of workers throughout the country. He became gradually disillusioned with Soviet life after the Revolution and grew more critical of it. Vladimir Ilyich Lenin (1924) ranks among Mayakovsky's best-known longer poems. However, his struggle with literary opponents and unhappy romantic experiences resulted in him committing suicide in 1930.

### **16 Fadeyev, Aleksandr (1901-1956)**

Author of a book entitled *The Young Guard*, which praised the underground resistance of a group of young communists living under German occupation with crude distortions. It was criticized by the Russian propaganda as a means of ideological zombing of the young generation.

### **17 Struggle against religion**

The 1930s was a time of anti-religion struggle in the USSR. In those years it was not safe to go to synagogue or to church. Places of worship, statues of saints, etc. were removed; rabbis, Orthodox and Roman Catholic priests disappeared behind KGB walls.

### **18 Molotov, V**

P. (1890-1986): Statesman and member of the Communist Party leadership. From 1939, Minister of Foreign Affairs. On June 22, 1941 he announced the German attack on the USSR on the radio. He and Eden also worked out the percentages agreement after the war, about Soviet and western spheres of influence in the new Europe.